

March 9, 2021

I'm sharing a letter that California State Controller Betty Yee wrote to Kaiser executives last week to show that top state officials are concerned about Kaiser Permanente's ability to provide timely access to mental health care now and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Betty also sits on the board of the California Public Employees Retirement System (CalPERS), which is Kaiser's largest account. In 2019, at Betty's behest, the board's Pension and Health Benefits Committee required officials from Kaiser and other insurers to answer concerns about whether they were providing adequate mental health services to the system's 1.5 million health care beneficiaries.

In her March 4 letter to Kaiser executives, Betty urged them to meet with NUHW-represented Kaiser therapists to address access and workload issues and informed them that she will be "asking CalPERS to hold another hearing regarding mental health access in light of the pandemic to get updates from all our health care plans."

Betty also reiterated the concerns so many clinicians have expressed directly to Kaiser officials and in our recent member survey.

"They report of unsustainable workloads, higher acuity levels among their patients and increased risk of suicide. If your clinicians and psychologists struggled to timely accommodate your patient's mental health needs before the pandemic, they are now rightfully panicked at the increasing number of co-worker resignations, further exacerbating their ability to do the jobs in the way they were trained and believe best serves your members."

Here is the [full letter](#). We expect other state leaders to follow Betty's lead in making clear to Kaiser that it must work with clinicians to address the rising demand for mental health care and improve access to care. Also, we are continuing our work to support SB 221, the bill that would require all insurers to provide return appointments within 10 business days. The bill will go before the State Senate Health Committee on March 17, with testimony to be provided by a Kaiser clinician and a former Kaiser patient.

In Unity,

Sal Rosselli, President
National Union of Healthcare Workers